

# Practice-Oriented Exercises as One of the Ways to Form the Competences of University Students

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The article describes the methods of teaching students majoring in languages with the use of practice-oriented exercises, the need for the development and implementation of which is defined by a new methodological basis of modern higher vocational education – a competence-based approach. The study hypothesis involves the assumption that practice-oriented exercises allow to intensify the mental, practical and creative student activities, form a positive motivation both to study Japanese and be engaged in future professional activities. The article contains the results of the joint work of teachers of the Sakhalin State University on drawing up and introduction of practice-oriented exercises for students studying Japanese at the level of professional communication at the university and majoring in "Oriental and African Studies" and "Pedagogical Education". The study represents the general content of practice-oriented exercises, implying an interdisciplinary impact and integration of training courses, independent work of students, students' clear understanding of the ultimate goals of the task and assessment means. The content of each exercise, the rationale for its development, objectives, targets, the progress and the learning results have been described in detail. Students' comments have been presented demonstrating the efficiency of using practice-oriented exercises in the educational process.

*Keywords:* competences; methods of teaching students; practice-oriented exercises; Japanese language; educational process

## INTRODUCTION

### Relevance of the study

A competence-based approach described in the works of Bermus A.G., Zimnyaya I.A., Kogan E.Y., Lebedev O.E., etc. is a new methodological basis of the modern educational process at universities, which determines all the components of the educational system (Bystrova, 2004, p. 40). A competence-based approach is focused on practical learning results – competences that are fixed and described in the Federal State Educational Standards for Higher Professional Education (FSES HPE). FSES HPE are a set of compulsory requirements necessary for the implementation of major

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educational programs, which depend on training areas and types of future professional activity of graduates (FSES HPE 2014, FSES HPE 2010).

As for such language majors as "Oriental and African Studies" (the learning profile "Languages and Literature of Asian and African countries (Japan)" and "Pedagogic Education" (the learning profile "Foreign language" (Japanese)), according to FSES HPE, the leading competences related to the future professional activity of students, i.e. the Japanese language and the language-speaking country, include:

- the ability and willingness to the written and oral communication in an oriental language;
- knowledge of an oriental language at the level of professional communication;
- knowledge of the basic features of material and intellectual culture of the studied country;
- the ability to apply the knowledge of basic geographic, demographic, economic and socio-political characteristics of the studied country.

In the pedagogical process of the university it is possible to form the above-mentioned competences of the students on the basis of their acquired theoretical knowledge and development of practical skills. For this, the educational process should provide for specific methods of training which, on the one hand, would allow to link theoretical and practical training of students in language learning; and would take into account the professional direction of students, on the other hand.

One of those special types of training may include practice-oriented exercises which represent the tasks performed by the students as part of language lessons and based on the interdisciplinary interaction of theoretical and practical disciplines of the curriculum, the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills of students, the continuity of knowledge on different stages of language training.

## **The current state of the study subject**

Practice-oriented exercises are an integral part of the learning process associated with the study of foreign languages, as their use by the teacher during language training helps students:

- 1) master an educational program, ensuring effective training of a graduate who complies with the requirements of the employer;
- 2) demonstrate and understand one's own level of readiness for practical activity;
- 3) receive not only theoretical knowledge, but also develop the skills of performance of professional tasks;
- 4) increase the motivation to study theoretical material due to the need to solve practical problems;
- 5) learn to work in a team.

Despite the apparent benefits of practice-oriented exercises, the analysis of the content of programs of educational disciplines implemented in the educational process of the Sakhalin State University in the linguistic majors "Oriental and African Studies" and "Pedagogic Education" allowed to define the lack of development and the use of such kinds of tasks at language lessons. It has also been concluded that the tasks performed by students at Japanese lessons are related to their future professional activity, but at the same time, they are often locally focused on the provision of only certain theoretical knowledge or practical skills.

Conclusions have been validated by students' responses to a questionnaire about the peculiarities of the arrangement of Japanese lessons at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Tourism and Service of the Sakhalin State University. Thirty-five (35) students of years 1-4 majoring in "Oriental and African Studies" and "Pedagogic Education" were involved in the survey. According to the survey results, more than half of students (79%) do not see the link between theoretical and practical material in the exercises they do at language lessons; 48% of students do not understand how

the exercises done at lessons will help them in real-life communicative situations; 63% of respondents replied that the exercises provided by the teacher in class allow to obtain new theoretical knowledge, but do not form the skills of their practical application in solving professional problems; 24% of students indicated that the exercises do not contribute to their motivation for independent acquisition of new knowledge necessary for further professional activity; 88% of students indicated the lack of tasks at language lessons that would help cope with the difficulties in understanding of the unadapted Japanese speech and "see" the reality of the language-speaking country.

## Purpose of the study

The following purpose of the study has been set: to develop and introduce in the learning process for students majoring in the language areas "Oriental and African Studies" and "Pedagogic Education" practice-oriented exercises aimed at the elimination of the identified imbalance in the language training of students whose professional activity is related to the Japanese language and Japan.

In the development of exercises, we relied on the works of Seredenko P.V. (2013), Tarlykov V.A., Shekhonin A.A. (2009), dedicated to the development of competences of university students, and reasoned as follows:

- each exercise should be an "independent activity", which should, at the same time, be substantial and coherent with other types of student activities, provided by the curriculum;
- the complexity of the content of the exercise tasks will depend on the stage of language training, each of which determines and complements the subsequent one, as the complexity of the Japanese language is increasing with each subsequent stage of training at the university;
- in the preparation of exercises it is important to consider interdisciplinary interaction and integration of knowledge that would naturally complement the content of vocational training of graduates, determined by the educational standards, and achieve the main pedagogical result – to prepare a competent specialist ready for the professional work;
- exercises should be drawn up so that students had a clear understanding of the ultimate goal of the task performed, as well as a clear knowledge of assessment tools that allow to assess the results achieved in the performance of the exercises and to analyze one's own level of achievement of the target goal;
- in the performance of the exercise tasks the independent work of students should be provided and planned, the control over the results of this work should be ensured, which will serve as a prerequisite to form a deliberate motivation of students to gain knowledge, skills and develop personal qualities.

## The hypothesis of the study

We assume that the use of the developed practice-oriented exercises included in the training process will help:

- combine theoretical and practical training of students at different stages of language training;
- improve the mental, practical, creative activity of students;
- simulate a situation of professional activities, covering different directions of the practical activity of a future specialist;
- improve students' motivation to learn Japanese, as well as motivation to the further professional activity.

## METHODS

In order to achieve the objective and confirm the hypothesis of the study we have been developed the following practice-oriented exercises: "The stories of the language-speaking country", "Presentation of the Japanese film *Densya Otoko*", "Summer holidays report", "Phone call", "Video interview", "Translator". The testing of exercises has been conducted over four years (2011-2015) at Japanese lessons among students of years 1-4 of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Tourism and Service of the Sakhalin State University. 49 students took part in the experiment.

### **The exercise "Stories-conversation about the language-speaking country"**

#### **Features of the exercise**

This exercise has been developed for first-year students and got its name because of the delivery of a new material during language classes. The information about the language-speaking country was provided at the lesson not in the traditional way, where the dominant role is played by the teacher, but in the form of interesting facts about Japan and conversations-discussions of the provided information at the lesson. Having changed the traditional approach with the dominant role of the teacher when presenting the material, we tried to attach the personally-semantic meaning to the provided information: in order to increase the personal meaning of the studied material the students were offered in advance to study the problem with the right to choose a source; select and suggest a topic for study. During in-class delivery of the material each student could express his/her views on the new information, supplement and discuss it in the classroom. "The story containing planned inaccuracies or errors" has also been used – after having studied the problem the students were required to find "errors" or "inaccuracies" in the teacher's story and reasonably correct them.

#### **Topics for stories-conversations**

The topics for "stories-conversations" about the language-speaking country were planned based on the results of the questionnaire survey carried out at the beginning of the academic year among students who had just began to study Japanese. The content of the questionnaire included questions about the cultural, historical and geographical features of Japan in order to identify the general level of students' knowledge of the language-speaking country, obtained before entering the university.

Having identified the most erroneous or unknown facts about the language-speaking country on the basis of the analysis of student's responses, the thematic plan of stories-conversations has been developed, see [Table 1], in which the study of each topic was focused on competence development through the study of various information about Japan (culture, history, traditions, communication ethics, etc.).

When planning the content and conduct of stories-conversations, we relied on the following teaching and visual aids:

Tanosiku emeru Nikhon-no kurasi 12-ka getsu Moons, Months and Seasons (Usuda, 1994), Minna-no nikhongo sekyu I. Khonsatsu (2012), Sinnikhongo-no kiso II. Fukusyu bideo 60 pun (1996), Terebi Nikhon-go kodza sekyu II sukitto. Dzoku yan-san-to nikhon-no khitobito. 14wa-19wa. Kokusai koryu kikin bideo kedzai (1991), etc.

**Table 1:** The thematic plan of stories-conversations for first-year students.

The period for studying the topic	Topics for stories-conversations
September	<i>nagatsuki</i> (the old name of September); <i>otsukimi</i> (admiring the moon); <i>bo:sai-no khi</i> (the day of disaster prevention); <i>keiro:-no khi</i> (the Day of Older Persons)
October	<i>kannadzuki</i> (the old name of October); <i>rokue: karenda</i> (the calendar of advantaged and disadvantaged days); <i>taiiku-no khi</i> (Sports Day); <i>keiba</i> (horse racing)
November	<i>simotsuki</i> (the old name of November); <i>bunka-no khi</i> (Culture Day); <i>sitigosan</i> (the day of Seven-Five-Three-year-old children); <i>aki-no adzi, aki-no noyama</i> (autumn food, flora and fauna)
December	<i>sivasu</i> (the old name of December); <i>tenno tandzebi</i> (the Emperor's Birthday (23.12)); Japanese Christmas and New Year ( <i>bo:nennkai; okadzari uri; oosodzi; nengadze</i> ; 108 bell beats); writing Christmas cards in Japanese; <i>Santa Kurosu origami</i> (paper Santa Claus)
January	<i>mutsuki</i> (the old name of January); <i>gandzitsu</i> (the first day of the new year); <i>seidzin-no khi</i> (Coming of Age Day); <i>fuyu-no adzi, aki-no noyama</i> (winter food, flora and fauna)
February	<i>kisaragi</i> (the old name of January); <i>sotsubun</i> and <i>rissyun</i> (Eve and the beginning of spring (03 and 04.01)); <i>yuki matsuri</i> (Snow Festival); <i>mamemaki</i> (spreading beans); entrance examinations in Japan; Okinawa island; Quiz "The World and Japan"
March	<i>yaei</i> (the old name of March); <i>khinamatsuri</i> (girls holiday (03.03)); <i>omidzutori</i> (filling with water); <i>sotsugesiki</i> (graduation ceremony); gambling games in Japan (lottery; <i>patinko</i> )
April	<i>udzuki</i> (the old name of April); <i>okhanami</i> (admiring cherry blossoms); <i>nyusyasiki</i> (employment); <i>nikhon-no puro yakyu:</i> (Japanese professional baseball); <i>midori-no khi</i> (Greenery Day); <i>goruden uiku</i> ("Golden Week"); <i>so:dzo:-no dobutsu</i> (fairy beasts)
May	<i>satsuki</i> (the old name of May); <i>kodomo-no khi</i> (Boys Day (05.05)); <i>khakha-no khi</i> (Mother's Day (second Sunday in May)); historical periods in Japan; monetary system in Japan; images on the banknotes and coins in Japan
June	<i>minadzuki</i> (the old name of June); <i>koromogae</i> (change of clothes); bonus system in Japan; <i>teru-teru bodzu</i> (a traditional Japanese doll to ward off rain); wedding ceremony in Japan

## Technology of the exercise application

The following technology for the exercise application has been used at Japanese lessons:

- information about the language-speaking country is provided not at every lesson; if the teacher conducts Japanese lessons in a group four times a week or more, then it is enough to provide new information once or twice a week;

- information is provided within 5-15 minutes of the lesson (at the beginning or end of the lesson), since longer stories cause neglect of students and difficulties in memorizing information;
- presentation of information coincided with the studied topic or had been timed to coincide with an event occurring during its study;
- any information should be necessarily completed with the presentation of visual aids: pictures, educational films, photos, videos, etc.

For example, at the end of December the teacher discussed with students celebration of Christmas and New Year in Japan. Thus, at one of the lessons the students were told about Christmas and its attributes in Japan (in the city and in the family): *kurisumasu tsuri* (Christmas tree), *dzinguruberu-no merodi* (Christmas tune "Jingle Bells"), *purezento-no kokan* (exchanging gifts), *kurisumasu keki* (Christmas cake). For better assimilation of information the following visual aids have been used: pictures with images of the decorated Christmas Eve city, the Christmas family dinner, as well as listening to the melody "Jingle Bells".

At the next lesson students studied the features of the New Year celebrations in Japan. As a result, the students got an insight about such Christmas attributes as *oomisoka* (New Year's Eve), *osikosisoba* (buckwheat noodles, which are eaten on New Year's Eve), *dzeya-no kane* (108 bell beats), *gandzitsu* (the first day of the New Year), about New Year's food *oseti reri - otoso* and *odzoni*; *khatsumode* (visiting the temple on the first day of the New Year). The story was completed with the presentation of plaster casts or photographs and video (*Terebi nihongo kouza shokyu II sukittizoku yansan-to nihon-no hitobito 14wa-19wa kokusaikouryukikin bideokyouzai*, 1991).

At the last lesson prior to the New Year holidays, a Japanese ritual *purezento-no kokan* "exchanging gifts" was held. As we have seen from experience, this technique is very effective for bringing the student team together and developing a favorable climate in the group. Slightly modifying *purezento-no kokan* for Russian realities, we have organized this ritual as follows: each student brought an inexpensive Christmas gift (the maximum price of gifts is negotiated with students in advance); all the gifts were put in the "bag of Father the Frost", one student turned away from the audience, picked up a gift from the bag, while the second student, facing the group and not seeing what gift was got out of the bag, decided who would get this gift.

## **Presentation of the Japanese film "Densya Otoko"**

### **Features of the exercise**

This exercise has been designed for fourth-year students who already had an extensive lexical and grammatical base at the time of the conduct of this exercise and were ready to accept the unadapted information relevant to the realities of Japan. In addition, the final year students have already had experience in doing this type of exercises, as in the first year they were shown a full-length animated film directed by Hayao Miyazaki *Tonari-no totoro (My Neighbor Totoro)*, 1988 (Starchenko, 2013).

As a basis for the exercise we took the film *Densya Otoko (Fellow from the Suburban Train)* (Murakami, 2005) which is still popular in Japan, thanks to its interesting plot and unusual directorial decisions. A romantic comedy *Densya Otoko* with a clear plot contains the authentic information on the country study and actual vocabulary of the modern Japanese language. The film was divided into 16 episodes, lasting for 7-10 minutes. During the language lessons, the students were shown film episodes, during which the students had to do a block of practical exercises. It must be emphasized that *Densya Otoko* is not adapted to the students' level of knowledge of the Japanese language, so the purpose of the exercise was to form and develop foreign language and sociolinguistic knowledge of learners.

## Technology of the exercise application

At Japanese lessons the following teaching technology of the exercise application has been used:

- at the first lesson the teacher told the students the name of the movie and turned on the soundtrack. After listening to the soundtrack the students were to make their assumptions about the plot of the movie. After an exchange of views and discussion of possible variants of development of the action, the students watched the first episode of the comedy;
- film episodes were presented to the students one by one at each Japanese lesson;
- the total time of the exercise at each practice training was 20-30 minutes, depending on the content of the episode;
- each episode has been provided with the list of questions that were relevant to an understanding of the content of what the students got to see. Such questions encouraged students to comment and express their attitude to what was happening on the screen; the students were asked these questions before watching the next episode;
- after having watched the film episode and answered questions, the students continued to work, answering specific questions, expressing their views on what they had just saw and expressing their assumptions on further development of the plot;
- the film was showed with subtitles included, which facilitated the understanding of the plot development;
- after watching and discussing the episode the students' attention was focused on the specific use of linguistic means, common usage phrases, idioms, slang vocabulary;
- if necessary, in order to revise the information received the episode was demonstrated once again without subtitles. In this case, students had to hear the phrases underlined by the teacher and raise their hand, when they heard this phrase.
- watching a new episode begins with a brief summary of the episode that students watched at the previous lesson.

## Exercise "Summer holidays report"

### Features of the exercise

The project "Summer holidays report" has been designed for students of years 2-3 and implemented during summer holidays. At one of the last lessons of the academic year students received a task, the purpose of which was to make up a weekly summary report on summer holidays. Each student had to compose a report in Japanese and send it to the teacher by email.

## Technology of the exercise application

- a student wrote the first letter following no particular form, as the purpose was to confirm the contact with the teacher;
- in response to the first letter of a student the teacher wrote an email message in compliance with all the standards of drawing up a business e-mail and sent it individually to each recipient;
- having received the teacher's letter, a student had to write a response, etc.

When applying this technology, the teacher, by using in the next letters various everyday farewell phrases and greetings, forms of address and comments on the information received, enriched the vocabulary of a student and motivated him/her to use various linguistic means in the subsequent responses.

The teacher's response was divided into two parts – practical and didactic ones. In the practical part the teacher responded in Japanese, commenting on the information

received and asking questions. The purpose of including questions in the text of the letter was to stimulate the expanded student's written speech, thus, the questions usually began with interrogative words "why" or "how".

It is noteworthy that when exchanging letters students also began to ask the teacher questions. This fact indicated that the task had become a form of real-life motivated communication. In the didactic part of the letter the teacher commented on Russian grammatical, lexical and formal letter shortcomings. Thus, the learner-centered approach has been implemented that allowed students to receive didactic information relating to their letters.

### **The exercise "Phone call"**

#### **Features of the exercise**

This exercise has been developed for third-year students majoring in "Oriental and African Studies" and second-year students majoring in "Pedagogic education", the curriculum of which includes practical training. The objectives of the practice is to systematize and deepen theoretical and practical knowledge on cross-cultural and linguistic disciplines received at the university, as well as to apply theoretical knowledge in solving specific scientific and practical problems in professional activities. The practical training lasts for four weeks, during which students are required to fully apply the knowledge gained at lessons at practice sites – in the offices of Japanese companies. To fully succeed in practice, a student's ability to make business calls to native speakers is a particularly valuable quality. In this regard, the content of the exercise presented simulated professional situations related to communication with the "Japanese" by phone.

#### **Technology of the exercise application**

The exercise was conducted by using the textbook *Nihongo de bijinesu kaiwa* (Business dialogues in Japanese) published by Nitibei kaivagakuin (1987), which presents classical examples of speech forms when making phone calls in Japanese. The exercise was based on the scheme on the example of section 18 of the textbook (*Nihongo de bijinesu kaiwa*, 1987, pp. 108-109):

– Lesson I (30 minutes). The work began with listening to the recording of the dialogue and the discussion of the main content of the conversation; after that students determined the characteristics for the oral variant of the official-business style of the Japanese language. Before listening again, students were given a task to write down polite forms and patterns of speech that they heard during the conversation. After listening the students shared information, clarified forms and meanings of the heard and written speech pattern. A substantially expanded text of the dialogue and the experience of the exercise implementation were used so that each of the students will hear and write down a pattern that would not be repeated by other students. Before the third listening, the students received the text of the dialogue that allowed them to monitor its progress, reinforcing the audio material with the written text. At the end of the third listening the teacher answered questions on the lexical and grammatical part of the dialogue, commented on everyday phrases typical for business etiquette in Japan. Then the teacher conducted general questioning during which phrases from the dialogue were randomly practiced and translated into Russian and Japanese. It is important to note that the phrases to be translated into Russian and Japanese languages were alternated in a random order that helped to consolidate the skills of transfer "from one language to another". As homework the students were given a task to memorize basic phrases of the dialogue provided by the teacher and practiced during the first lesson.

– Lesson II (30 minutes). Students randomly selected cards (Figure 1), according to which roles and the plot of the dialogue were distributed. Further,

"working pairs" were also randomly determined. In case of an odd number of students there was a set of cards with the option "Translator" and a part of task which should be done in the mode "Translator" described below. Then the teacher formulated the purpose of the dialogue – it was to tell about the purpose of your phone call and appoint a personal meeting. In addition, in the preparation to the task implementation the teacher clarified the vocabulary necessary for the dialogue, thus eliminating one of possible learning difficulties.

<b>Card A-1</b> You are the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies. The Vice-Rector for International Relations, Mr. Ivanov, said something to you about some Japanese who wants to make an appointment. Tomorrow you will have 4 lectures. Today too, by the way.	<b>Card B-1</b> You are a representative of a private language school in Japan; upon the recommendation of the Vice-Rector for International Affairs, Mr. Ivanov, you call the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies and make an appointment to talk about programs at your school. You are flying back home this Saturday.
<b>Card A-2</b> You are the Director of the Pedagogic Institute. The Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, Mrs. Petrova, said something to you about some Japanese researcher who will call you these days. Tomorrow you will have 4 lectures. Today too, by the way.	<b>Card B-2</b> You are a researcher from the Centre of Slavic Studies of the Hokkaido University, studying pre-school education in Russia. You would like to show the materials of your research to the Director of the Pedagogic Institute and receive the review (recommendation letter) on your research work. You are calling upon the recommendation of the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs Mrs. Petrova. You are flying back to Japan this Saturday.
<b>Card A-3</b> You are the Director of the Sakhalin Regional Local History Museum. Professor Sidorov said something to you about the Japanese who came to Sakhalin and wants to meet you. You are very busy this week.	<b>Card B-3</b> You are the leader of the Hokkaido Ainu Association. This autumn you would like to hold a joint conference dedicated to the Ainu who lived on Karafuto. You are calling the Director of the Sakhalin Regional Local History Museum with a proposal to support the conference. You were recommended by Professor Sidorov. You are flying back home next Tuesday.

**Figure 1:** Sample cards with tasks for the conduct of the exercise "Phone call"

As can be seen from the cards, the information received by dialogue partners is incomplete. This kind of "information gap" was deliberately used in this exercise, for the purpose of creating the real-life communication conditions at lessons. The students, who received the role A, had to stay in the classroom; the students, who got the card B, had to come out to the hall, or to the next classroom, if it is possible at the university. After that the participants were given their roles and the exercise started: a student was required to call "his/her dialogue partner" and start a dialogue. It

should be noted that this exercise can be conducted in the language class, but in this case the element of real situation modeling will be lost, because the students will communicate with each other through the microphone, not through phones. In addition, another variant of this task is also possible – when a set of "named" cards initially contains paired cards A and B of different colors. In this case, students who have chosen these cards will automatically be a pair, and, coming out of the main classroom, they get the task to reproduce their own version of a situational dialogue recording it on the recorder.

During the exercise, the teacher ensured that the students did not speak Russian in problematic situations; they had to continue conversation in Japanese during conversations. The teacher did not interfere in the process.

At the end of the conversation, all students returned to the classroom and gave a brief report on the phone call on behalf of their character. Other students noted the information in a specific form, which was a form of control over the task implementation (Figure 2). The forms contained information about the characters of the dialogue, the topic of the phone call and the time of the appointment.

<i>Bamen 1</i>	
Asan-no purofairu	
Bsan-no purofairu	
mokuteki	
Apontomento-no hibi • jikan	

**Figure 2:** Sample test form for the exercise "Phone call".

In case two dialogue partners should record their own dialogue on the recorder, instead of a story on behalf of the actors, the students could give recording of the dialogue to listen at the lesson and on the basis of what they heard they had to fill in the test form.

The final stage (at the end of the semester) included a task in which students had to call a native speaker (a teacher – native speaker working at the Institute, an officer of a Japanese company, an employee of the Consulate, a Japanese student studying at the University, etc.). Similar to the previous experience, students got the cards where a topic for the phone call was written. The level of knowledge of the Japanese language students, the correct use of speech patterns, business communication style were assessed by a native speaker by using the test form which was handed in to the teacher after the exercise has been done.

### **The exercise "Video Interview"**

#### **The features of the exercise**

This exercise was developed for third-year students who already had sufficient vocabulary (over 2000 words) and grammar resources (over 100 structures) at the time of the conduct of this exercise. The content of the exercises was focused on the intensification of foreign communicative skills and ability to work in a team, ability to take decisions and take responsibility for them, as well as to stimulate search activity, develop skills to solve problems and draw one's own conclusions.

#### **Technology of the exercise application**

A study group on its own, with the help of the teacher or by the lot was divided into sub-groups (teams) of three or four people. Each of the subgroups received a task prepared by the teacher. The contents of tasks had about the same degree of difficulty

for all subgroups and it pertained to the previously studied lesson. For example, students during one of the Japanese language classes assorted the theme "Working away from family". Despite this theme the following task has been proposed – "Interview a Japanese working in your city. During the interview, find out what difficulties arise for the Japanese living away from home". Another task option: "Interview a Japanese working in your city. During the interview, find out how the Japanese spend their free time, while being away from their families".

By selecting (by lot) one of the tasks, all the teams had equal conditions for its implementation:

- all participants were required to capture the interview on video; the means for recording the interview (video camera, mobile phone, camera, video communication through Skype software, etc.) were chosen by the subgroup;
- all members of the subgroup were to take part in the task implementation; the roles of the participants in the subgroup of students in the performance of tasks were independently distributed;
- each participant had the right to express his/her own opinion on the decision of any matter;
- one should not criticize a subgroup participant; only an idea could be criticized;
- each subgroup chooses a respondent (a native speaker) independently; the respondent could be a teacher-native speaker working at the institute, an employee of a Japanese company, an employee of the Consulate, Japanese students studying at the university, etc.; if the team was hampered with a choice of an object for an interview, the subgroup had the right to seek the assistance of a teacher;
- it was necessary to carry out the task within two weeks from the date of its receipt; after this period the subgroup had to prepare a presentation of a video interview in audience.

After the distribution of tasks among subgroups, students were given the time for group or individual consultations on a given issue; thus, the teacher provided the opportunity for students to ask for help if they had difficulty in solving the problem. However, during consultations the teacher's role is limited to the activities of students to achieve the task objectives that were often expressed in interview questions written by the students or help in the "choice" of the Japanese for interview. The teacher could help participants of the subgroup to build up a phrase, highlight the important thing, formulate the idea, thus discreetly helping to conduct an independent search for the solutions to any problem without suppressing the activity of pupils.

At the end of two weeks allotted for the preparations of the interview, the teacher informed the students, when and in what the demonstration of the interviews form would take place. A progress report is no less important than the job process itself, since, according to the algorithm of the scientific research, "the study cannot be considered complete if there is no phase of defense of the performed research or implemented project" (Seredenko, 2013, p. 71). Therefore, when planning the "reporting lessons" in a video interview the important task for a teacher was to create the necessary conditions to enable all students to protect their "video projects": create discussion situation, to draw the students and teachers of other years of study as spectators, and encourage them to discuss the presented material.

At the "reporting lessons", each team had to show its story, while the rest of the students had to fix the main respondent's answers on a given topic, and then ask questions to the responding team in Japanese and to express their views on holding interviews. After the presentation of all speeches the teacher with students summarized information on the topic "Working away from family," summing up the theme discussed.

## **Exercise "Translator"**

### **Background of the exercise development**

The background of the exercise "Translator" development was the questionnaire of graduate students, who during the time of their study at the university had already completed vocational practical training provided for educational standards in the form of educational and industrial practices while studying in high school, one of the sections of which is to participate in the practice of translation. According to the survey, 87.5% of students had difficulties when translating from Russian into Japanese and vice versa. The respondents noted the following reasons for the difficulties occurred in the translation process: the lack of knowledge of eastern languages (14.3% of the students), the lack of experience of translation activity (42.9% of the students), the inability to "transfer" from one language to another (17.9% of the students), difficulty in choosing the method of transfer (25.0% of the respondents). 93% of the students noted the exercise "Translator" when answering the question, which exercises at language lessons would help students to overcome these difficulties and help in practical activities during the practice.

### **Features of the exercise**

An exercise or a game "Translator" is one of the most common tasks at foreign language lessons in high school. Guidelines for such kind of exercise in the learning process can be found in the works of S.I. Bayramova (Bayramova, 2006), E.S. Wojtsekowskaya (2006), T.G. Dubinina (2010), L.K. Latysheva (2003), A.V. Puzakova (2015) and others. In the development of the exercise "Translator" for students studying Japanese majoring in "Oriental and African Studies" and "Teacher Education", we relied on the Japan Foundation standards, which make it possible to determine whether the level of proficiency in Japanese corresponds to the System of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference), including research, teaching and assessment of the levels of foreign language used in the European Union (JF Nihongo kyoiku sutandato, 2010; JF Nihongo kyoiku towa, 2010).

By changing the contents of tasks in line with our objectives, we got the exercise, simulating future professional activity of language students and aimed at the development of students' translation skills. We believe that this exercise helps not only to create the necessary communicative attitude, but also to check the students' language skills at lessons, get the experience of translation, learn how to solve typical translation problems and develop oral skills of quick cross-language translation.

It should be emphasized that, depending on the content of the task prepared by the teacher, the exercise "Translator" can be conducted at different stages of language training. However, we assume that final years of study are the most important for the performance of such tasks, since by that time students already have translation experience gained during the practices and can assess their own capabilities for such occupation; secondly, students have studied a theoretical discipline "Theory and Practice of Translation" in the third year of studies, during which they got experience in translation from Japanese into Russian; and, thirdly, students have the necessary knowledge of the Japanese language for the translation on serious topics that may arise in the future professional work.

### **Technology of the exercise application**

Before the lesson, which is planned to hold an exercise "Translator", the teacher made a dialogue for two actors (or more, depending on the number of students in the

language group) – "native speaker" (a replica in Japanese) and "Russian" (replicas in Russian). The replicas of actors necessarily involve lexical, grammatical and hieroglyphic material corresponding to the average phase of training in high school.

The timing of the exercise should not exceed 20-25 minutes of the lesson time, of which about five minutes were provided for the analysis of the work performed. The exercise was carried out before or after the completion of any form of class work (explaining the new material, working out lexical or grammatical skills, checking homework, etc.) in an intensive pace. To this end, prior to the start of the exercise the teacher informed the students about the rules of conduct during the game: concentration, the unacceptability of any mutual assistance, tips, comments and criticism of "translators" because complete imitation and "immersion" in the translation work was important. At the same time, "translators" had to be mentally prepared for brainstorming their mistakes and/or behavior after the exercise was completed.

The criterion for assessing the quality of a "translator's" work varied depending on the complexity of the translated material. The criteria for assessing the quality included logical completeness of phrases and sentences, i.e., even if a student could not translate as accurate as possible or he/she missed any part of the said phrase, he/she had to complete the thought logically; or, on the contrary, the maximum speed and accuracy of the translation of the speech content preserving the features of a speaker's speech style.

The exercise began with the distribution of the participants' roles: the teacher provided students with the roles of "translator", "Japanese", "Russian" and observers. If the language group did not exceed seven, it was appropriate to appoint a "translator", a "Japanese" and a "Russian". If the group had more than seven people, the teacher planned the dialogue so that it consisted of some "Japanese" and "Russian". If necessary, two or more "translators" could participate in the exercise, replacing each other in the translation of the dialog.

Each participant received a corresponding task-card: "translator" – the explanation of communicative situations (everyday communication, tourism, business meetings, etc.) and a list of key structures, phrases or words necessary to perform the translation; "Russian" and "Japanese" – texts for reading, relevant vocabulary and grammar lessons; observers – a card for assessment of the "translator's" work and if the sentences were read correctly by the "Japanese".

The participants were given 3-4 minutes to view the resulting material, after which the party ("Japanese" or "Russian", depending on the content of the dialogue) read his role and gave time to the translator to complete the translation. Then the second student read the replica and waited for its translation, etc. During the exercise the teacher watched the observers to listen to the translation carefully and did not forget to fix inaccuracies or errors. Also, in case of difficulty of the translation, the teacher might tactfully, in a benevolent tone help the translator prompt the necessary phrase. In addition, the teacher's task was to monitor the roles of participants in order to avoid involvement of the same students in recurring roles.

At the end of the exercise, after collective discussions of the "translator's" work, the observers put the points on the score sheet for the work of the "translator" and "Japanese", i.e. the student, who read replicas in Japanese with the correct intonation and made no errors. After all members of the group were in the role of the "translator" and "Japanese", at one of the lessons, for example, at the final lesson of a semester, a teacher announced "winners" according to the amount of points. As practice shows, one of the most effective methods of the semester completion was awarding the "winners". Awards could be such gifts as crayons and paper for origami, as well as bonuses in the form of additional teaching points or excellent marks.

## Examples of the exercise cards

There are examples of exercise cards below on the topic "Health", developed for the section 8 of the textbook *Temabetsu tyukyu-cara manabu Nihongo* (Matsuda, 2003) (Figure 3), which is the main textbook for fourth-year students majoring in "Oriental and African Studies" and "Teacher Education" of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Tourism and Service of Sakhalin State University".

## RESULTS

### Exercise "Stories-conversations about the language-speaking country"

At the end of the year the following survey of students regarding the effective use of this kind of exercise was held – "*Stories-conversations about the language-speaking country*". 93% of first-year students welcomed the "*Stories-conversations about the language-speaking country*" noting that this exercise helped better remember the theoretical information about the language spoken by learning it practically; it made them aware of the importance of theoretical preparation for further communication with the Japanese in real-life communication situations; helped repeat previously studied vocabulary and learn new words; it influenced the desire to learn the language more independently, thanks to demonstrated attributes of the Japanese life and culture. The remaining 7% of the respondents abstained from evaluating the effectiveness of this exercise by pointing out that their motivation to study Japan and Japanese language does not depend on the way the teacher explains the linguistic material. However, a positive response from these students on the need to continue the conduct of this kind of stories-conversations in their groups on the second and subsequent years of study raises doubts about the absence of the link between the formation of their motivation spectrum and the ways to represent the linguistic material.

### Exercise "Presentation of the Japanese film Densha Otoko"

The implementation of the exercise allowed to observe the processes of the development of a value attitude to studies, increase students' confidence in their possibilities by including in the educational material various elements of foreign language culture, awareness of understanding of the Japanese language and unadapted "immersion" in the realities of the target language-speaking country. The results of the survey conducted after watching the final episode of the film suggested that this kind of exercise is very effective for learning new vocabulary and grammatical structures (54% of respondents); needed to secure natural language responses (78% of students); it is important for the development of skills of matching the authentic language means in standard situations of communication (88% of students); required in the study of conversational Japanese, because it helps to understand, by whom and in what context this or that phrase should be pronounced (96% of respondents); it is much more effective to study the Japanese language and understanding linguistic-cultural features than teaching materials adapted to each year of study (99% of students).

<b>"Translator's" card</b>				
Translation subject	Medical technology. The problems of modern medicine.			
Communicative situation				
Key vocabulary				
Key grammar	~hajime / ~wo megutte / ~kotokara / ~wakedewanai			
<b>"Russian's" card</b>				
Translation subject	Medical technology. The problems of modern medicine.			
Communicative situation				
Replica 1:				
Replica 3:				
<b>"Japanese's" card</b>				
Translation subject	Medical technology. The problems of modern medicine.			
Communicative situation				
Replica 2:				
Replica 4:				
<b>"Observer's" card</b>				
Translation subject	Medical technology. The problems of modern medicine.			
Communicative situation				
<b>Rate if the sentences read by the "Japanese" were correct</b> , putting the corresponding sign after each of it: «○» (was read correctly); «△» (was read with some inaccuracies / errors); «×» (was read not correctly)				
Replica 2:	( )			
Replica 4:	( )			
<b>Rate the "translator's" work</b> on the following criteria, assigning the appropriate score:				
1. Correct translation from Russian to Japanese	2. Correct translation from Japanese to Russian	3. Rate of speech	4. Culture of Russian speech	5. Behavior during the translation
<b>3 points</b>	1; 2: translation is done correctly / 3: rate of speech is quick / 4: literate and informative sentences of Russian speech / 5: behavior is corresponding to the situation.			
<b>2 points</b>	1; 2: translation is done with minor errors / 3: rate of speech is rather quick; 4: slight deviations from the norms of the Russian language / 5: excessive emotionality.			
<b>1 point</b>	1; 2: inaccurate transmission of information / 3: normal rate of speech / 4: the presence of excess and meaningless words ("tipa", "koroche", etc.) / 5: excessive emotionality and gestures.			
<b>0 points</b>	1; 2: the transfer of translation meaning is broken (distorted) / 3: slow rate of speech / 4: illiterate speech, a lot of excess and meaningless words / 5: violation of professional conduct framework.			

**Figure 3:** Sample cards for the exercise "Translator"

### Exercise "Summer holidays report"

When analyzing the efficiency of this task-project it can be noted that students develop the practical skills of drawing up emails and creating print texts in Japanese, which have their own specifics. Another important advantage of this exercise is that by regularly carrying on correspondence a student naturally maintained the level of proficiency in Japanese, actualizing the knowledge gained in the course of language

training at Japanese lessons. The results of the survey, conducted among students during one of the first lessons, regarding the benefits of such an exercise, allow to state that this work has contributed to the following: it enhanced students' motivation to brush up and further study theoretical material to solve practical problems (71% of respondents); developed reflective abilities of students through the assessment of their own level of preparedness for practice (82% of respondents); worked out the skills of practical application of knowledge obtained during the training course (90% of respondents).

### **Exercise "Telephone call"**

The selected type of work, talking on the phone, is a complicated one for communication, as telephone calls in which the callers do not see each other create more communicative difficulties. At the same time, one cannot deny the positive experience of this exercise in the learning process: this kind of exercise helped stimulate students to real business communication, allowing them to apply practical skills with language forms, knowledge of business etiquette and the foundations of the official style of communication. This can be confirmed by the marks indicated by native speakers in the control forms. Thus, 72% of students got the mark "excellent" for a conversation on the phone language media; 21% of students got "good" marks; 7% of students got "satisfactory" marks.

### **Exercise "Video-interview"**

As for the positive experience of the exercise "Video interview" it may be noted that during the preparation and conduct of interviews the students activated their foreign-language communication skills, formed teamwork skills and skills of making team decisions. In addition, it should be noted that the students who have taken their own interviews, analyzed the gained experience communicating with native speakers, and sought to tell others about it, which stimulated the development of reflective abilities of students. In addition, the exercise "Video interview" allowed to form in the minds of students the relations between the material learned at the lessons and the actual communicative experience that will help students in further training activities in the study of theoretical and practical courses. It will also be the key to the success in the implementation of future professional duties.

### **Exercise "Translator"**

To analyze the effectiveness of the game "Translator" the written survey of students has been used, in which students had to express their own opinion about the benefits of this kind of exercise as part of the training sessions. According to the survey, 59% of students said that in addition to the development of communication skills, the game helped to increase self-esteem and personal commitment to their future professional activity; 32% of the students indicated that the game helped to learn not to react to the emotional content of the words of the speaker; 49% of respondents said that in the process of "working" as a translator, they have learned to control their behavior and culture of the Russian language; 73% of the students stressed that the game has led to the independent work on the translation behavior.

## **DISCUSSION**

As a result of the conducted study its objective has been reached: practice-oriented exercises have been developed and implemented into the educational process of students majoring in the linguistic areas "Oriental and African Studies" and "Teacher

Education". In addition, the achieved positive results, opinions of students, monitoring the work and achievements of students during language lessons and practical training, as well as private teaching experience confirmed the hypothesis of the study: with the use of the practice-oriented exercises developed and included in the educational process, the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills of students at different stages of language training has been ensured; students have been involved in the mental, practical, creative activity; the situations of professional activity of future graduates have been stimulated; the motivation of students to study the Japanese language, the language-speaking country, future professional activities has been supported and enhanced.

At the same time, the difficulties encountered during the development and implementation of practice-oriented exercises should also be considered.

Firstly, the planning of exercises is a rather time-consuming process that requires time and effort of a teacher, because in educational and methodical literature of both Russian and Japanese authors, there are no elaborate examples of this kind of exercise. For example, in order to implement the exercise "Translator" we had to develop our own dialogues that took five hours or more for making up the replicas for each dialogue partner. We concluded that the exercise "Translator" should be held twice or three times a month. This would allow a teacher, on the one hand, to plan carefully the content of replicas and theme of the dialogues, and, on the other hand, to provide students with an opportunity to learn and repeat vocabulary, grammar and hieroglyphics that they have learnt before.

Secondly, during the exercise implementation passivity and lack of preparedness of some students cannot be excluded. In such cases, during the exercise we had to redistribute the roles of the participants, as complete elimination of the untrained student could lead to a reduction of his/her creative activity, adverse conditions at the lesson and, as a result, adversely affect the results of the exercise as a whole.

Thirdly, during the initial introduction of the exercises in class, when the process of the task implementation is unfamiliar and unusual for students, some exercises (e.g., "Translator", "Video interview") caused some students' difficulties related to their unwillingness to engage in the activity, work in a team, to communicate and interact with various participants of the exercise. However, achieving one of the main goals of the exercises – formation of the teamwork skills in the performance of professional tasks, the students gradually learnt to express their views and defend their own opinion, to deal with emerging challenges, which in turn has contributed not only to the development of independency in solution of actual problems, but was also important to the formation of competences necessary for future graduates of linguistic disciplines.

## CONCLUSION

Basing on student surveys, interviews with native speakers and our own teaching experience, we can conclude that the exercises, developed and included into the educational process for students majoring in "Oriental and African Studies" and "Teacher Education" have received positive feedback from both students and teachers of the Japanese language. Due to the new experience of the organization of language training, we were able to combine theoretical and practical training of students at different stages of language learning, improve the preparation of students for future career by modeling professional intercultural situations, maintain and increase students' motivation for learning and future professional activities, improve understanding of the unadapted Japanese speech, rules of the conduct and interaction with native speakers, which, in turn, had an impact on the general level of the development of the leading competences of students required for high-quality and effective implementation of the future profession.

At the same time, we do not believe that the learning process should be limited to the above-listed exercises. In the further educational work we intend to continue developing new practice-exercises and analyzing the practical experience of using those tasks that have already been included in the educational process, develop and improve their content.

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